

Project SeaHawk

A unity of effort.

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“The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism” identifies that the terrorist threat is a flexible, transnational network structure, enabled by modern technology and characterized by interconnectivity both within and between groups. In this environment, terrorists work together in funding, sharing intelligence, training, logistics, and planning and executing attacks.¹

“The 9/11 Commission Report” further unveils the interwoven relationships between numerous extremist organizations. The report discusses al Qaeda’s role in funding and equipping extremists.² It describes tactical and operational support for Tajikistani extremists involved in internal ethnic fighting³ and weapons support for Somali warlords battling U.S. forces.⁴ The report also sites that al Qaeda has received explosives training from operatives in Iran and intelligence and security training from Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁵

Both documents suggest that countering the collaborative relationship between dangerous extremist organizations likewise requires a unity of effort. “The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism” suggests that unity of effort requires coordination not only at the apex of the federal government, but also at the operational/tactical level, where response and intervention actions may be taken by diverse authorities, acting independently or in coordination.⁶

A Collaborative Effort

Unity of effort drives the strategic actions outlined in the “National Strategy for Maritime Security” (NSMS). Throughout the strategy it calls on the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), Defense (DOD), and Justice (DOJ) to come together to develop vertically and horizontally aligned solutions to address all-threat maritime security.

The NSMS calls on the three departments to lead U.S. efforts to integrate and align all United States government maritime security programs and initiatives into a comprehensive, cohesive national effort of scalable, layered security, which includes full alignment and coordination with appropriate state and local agencies, the private sector, and other nations.⁷

The NSMS also directs the departments to unify efforts to oversee the implementation of a shared situational awareness capability that integrates intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, navigation systems, and other operational information input, combined with access at multiple levels throughout the U.S. government.⁸

Unity of Effort

Project SeaHawk, an interagency pilot project in Charleston, SC, brings together representatives from the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and

Project SeaHawk participating agencies include:

Federal

Department of Justice
U.S. Coast Guard
Customs & Border Protection
Immigration & Customs Enforcement
FBI
U.S. Army
U.S. Navy
Department of State

State

South Carolina Law Enforcement Division
State Transport Police
State Ports Authority Police Department
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

Municipal & County

Charleston County Sheriff’s Office
Dorchester County Sheriff’s Office
Charleston County Emergency Services Charleston Area Marine Law Enforcement Unit
Charleston County Explosives Ordinance Disposal Unit
City of North Charleston Police Department
City of Charleston Police Department
Town of Mt. Pleasant Police Department
Charleston County Emergency Preparedness Division



Defense, working in daily partnership with state and local law enforcement officials and the transportation industry, to operationally implement many of the interagency elements described in the "National Strategy for Maritime Security."

The SeaHawk concept was developed in 2002 during an early post-9/11 multiagency port security exercise (Exercise Harbor Shield) in the Port of Charleston. Following the exercise, Sen. Ernest F. Hollings (SC senator until 2005), author of the "Maritime Transportation Safety Act of 2002," chartered the pilot project. Sen. Hollings identified that security and commerce within the port would be enhanced by the creation of maritime homeland security operations center and multiagency task force, which would coordinate and integrate the efforts of all agencies responsible for maritime homeland security. This task force would assess the relative risk of vessels, cargo and crewmembers before they enter the port and monitor operations throughout the port.

Established by Congress in 2003, Project SeaHawk is designed to demonstrate the value of interagency cooperation, joint operations, unity of command, and the sharing of intelligence and information to drive the risk-based allocation of homeland security/law enforcement resources across federal, state, and local jurisdictions. Project SeaHawk brings together the maritime and intermodal law enforcement operations, intelligence, and investigations of about 30 different federal, state, and local agencies with jurisdiction over one or more elements of the intermodal transportation system in South Carolina.

Project SeaHawk is coordinated by DOJ and operates under the National Incident Management System/Incident Command System

concepts outlined in the "National Response Plan." A standing unified command has been established, consisting of representatives from the Department of Justice, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division.

The unified command meets daily to review maritime and intermodal security information and create a common risk picture for the South Carolina ports. The unified command evaluates the operational history of pending ship arrivals, assesses each ship's cargo and crew, and examines truck and rail movements throughout the ports. Based on the common risk picture, unified command members create resource allocation plans and coordinate unique yet complementary activities between agencies and schedule multiagency prevention and deterrence operations.

Project SeaHawk also created a multiagency task force to unify the efforts of various federal, state, and local agencies, exercising jurisdiction over one or more elements of the marine transportation system. The task force coordinates agency-unique activities to avoid duplication of effort, engages in intelligence-



As an example, if a Coast Guard boarding team is conducting a security boarding of a vessel, Customs and Border Protection may choose to conduct a customs border search on another “elevated risk” vessel arriving at the same time, and the local marine patrol may be tasked to escort a third vessel. If CBP has interest in the crew or cargo aboard a vessel, then it may request that the boarding team conduct an at-sea security boarding, while CBP prepares to use its vehicle and cargo inspection system on containers coming off the ship.

Prevention First

Project SeaHawk's intelligence-

led policing activities are primarily prevention-oriented, and are driven by information flowing from the local law enforcement officers into the intelligence cycle.¹² The project created an interagency law enforcement intelligence section to coordinate the field level collection, assimilation, collation, and analysis of local intermodal related law enforcement information.¹³ The intelligence section fuses this information with national intelligence from a variety of databases and organizations and attempts to identify pre-incident indicators and warnings that may not yet rise to the national level.

Interagency Coordination of Effort

It is not uncommon to find USCG, CBP, and local law enforcement officers huddled over a conference room table, discussing an interesting piece of information discovered during an interagency boarding, or discussing how a piece of sensitive or classified information pertains to their agency. This level of coordination and collaboration is also consistent with the NSMS mandate to co-locate in multiagency centers to facilitate direct interaction and efficient use of limited resources.¹⁴

The interagency coordination center also facilitates special security operations and has been configured to act as an incident command post for agencies

preparing for or responding to a transportation security incident or other threat affecting the intermodal transportation system, such as oil spills, bridge closures, and hurricane response activities.

By sharing information and intelligence, creating a common risk picture / common operating picture, and integrating the day-to-day intermodal and maritime security activities across echelons of government and industry, Project SeaHawk is striving to deliver that unity of effort envisioned in the national strategies of the United States to help protect the homeland.

Future Plans

Sen. Lindsey Graham (SC) recently introduced legislation, the "Project Seahawk Implementation Act of 2006,"¹⁵ which would require the Coast Guard to establish interagency operational centers for maritime and port security. Sen. Graham has voiced strong support for the Seahawk concept, saying, "Project Seahawk is on the cutting edge in how we should address the security problems facing our ports," and that "Project Seahawk is not only important to Charleston, but the nation as a whole."¹⁶

The centers, modeled after SeaHawk, would facilitate day-to-day operational coordination, interagency cooperation, unity of command, and the sharing of intelligence information in a common mission to provide greater protection for port and intermodal transportation systems against acts of terrorism.

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Endnotes

- ¹ "The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism" p. 8.
- ² "The 9/11 Commission Report" p.58, p.150.
- ³ "The 9/11 Commission Report" p. 58.
- ⁴ "The 9/11 Commission Report" p. 60.
- ⁵ "The 9/11 Commission Report" p. 59.
- ⁶ "The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism" p. 27.
- ⁷ "The National Strategy for Maritime Security" p. 20.
- ⁸ "The National Strategy for Maritime Security" p. 16.
- ⁹ Secretary Michael Chertoff, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Policy Institute, March 16, 2005.
- ¹⁰ ADM James Loy, Statement on Port Security, CST Committee, Feb 2002.
- ¹¹ Mr. Jeffrey High, Statement before the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation, October 6, 2004.
- ¹² "Intelligence-Led Policing, The Integration of Community Policing and Law enforcement Intelligence," p. 44.
- ¹³ NIMS Basic – Command and Management, FEMA 501-2, March 27, 2006.
- ¹⁴ "The National Strategy for Maritime Security" p. 22.
- ¹⁵ Project Seahawk Implementation Act of 2006 – S.3542; Introduced by Sen Lindsey Graham 20 June 2006.
- ¹⁶ "Graham Secures Unanimous Senate Support for Project Seahawk" Press Release, 20 March 2006.



Coast Guard and local law enforcement boats from Charleston, S.C., participate in escort training procedures during exercise Harbor Shield 2002. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Dominic Hauser.